

LA EVALUACIÓN DE LA COMPETENCIA PRAGMÁTICA EN LENGUA EXTRANJERA A TRAVÉS DE UNA PRUEBA ADAPTATIVA

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ABSTRACT

Most standardized tests of English as a second language (ESL) and / or Foreign Language (EFL) are high stake tests, and a growing number of these offers two versions: a traditional pen & paper, and a computerized one. Some examining bodies also implement adaptive tests (CAT). The technological advance of these standardized tests, usually commercial, it is clear and beneficial at first sight. However, some important aspects of the curriculum such as pragmatic competence are not usually measured by such tests. The only computerized tests that include items that measure this competence are the Test of English as a Foreign Language Internet Based Test (TOEFL iBT®) in its listening comprehension part, and the Oxford Online Placement Test (OOPT).

This thesis aims to check if the OOPT, which is used to certify levels of EFL, is a valid indicator of the skills of interest such as pragmalinguistic competence and also to show whether this ability is measured appropriately for the intended use of this test. Moreover, it delves into the reasons why a group of 44 students, taking a first year course at the Facultat de Magisteri (University of Valencia), fail the items in the OOPT that specifically assess their pragmalinguistic competence.

Unlike previous studies, the interest of this thesis lies in the fact that it analyzes not only what kind of test method facets influence these students production of errors, but also the personal characteristics involved in their error production. All of that, from a cognitive and meta-linguistic perspective, according to the students own perception. For this purpose, a retrospective questionnaire was designed and administered to the group. Several quantitative analyses (correlation, multiple regression and correspondence) were implemented to analyze the concurrent validity of the test, the weight of pragmatic ability in the assessment, and the reasons underlying the production of errors, in that order.

Moreover, a descriptive analysis of the pragmatic items in the OOPT was conducted to check their content validity. The results clearly show which skills require greater attention from both, teachers and designers of this type of tests. The analysis indicates that the pragmatic block, along with the listening one, holds the highest number of errors made by the participants. Moreover, the main reason highlighted by them as the main source of errors is the lack of knowledge of certain lexical units contained in the pragmatics items.

Finally, some proposals consistent with the results are presented in order to help improve the quality of adaptive language testing. In addition, some ideas are suggested to overcome current limitations in the teaching of pragmalinguistic competence in EFL formal academic contexts.